Oscar Wilde

Only Dull People Are Brilliant at Breakfast

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ONLY DULL PEOPLE ARE BRILLIANT AT BREAKFAST

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Only Dull People Are Brilliant at Breakfast

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OSCAR WILDE

Born 1854, Dublin, Ireland
Died 1900, Paris, France

This selection is taken from *Nothing … Except My Genius: The Wit and Wisdom of Oscar Wilde*, Penguin Classics, 2010.

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‘It would be unfair to expect other people to be as remarkable as oneself.’

To know nothing about their great men is one of the necessary elements of English education.

We spend our days, each one of us, in looking for the secret of life. Well, the secret of life is in art.

The supreme object of life is to live. Few people live. It is true life only to realize one's own perfection, to make one's every dream a reality.

To me the life of the businessman who eats his breakfast early in the morning, catches a train for the city, stays there in the dingy, dusty atmosphere of the commercial world, and goes back to his house in the evening, and after supper to sleep, is worse than the life of the galley slave – his chains are golden instead of iron.

Bad art is a great deal worse than no art at all.

… nothing is worth doing except what the world says is impossible.

To make a good salad is to be a brilliant diplomatist – the problem is entirely the same in both cases. To know exactly how much oil one must put with one's vinegar.

Life is much too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it.

There is always more brass than brains in an aristocracy.

Good kings are the only dangerous enemies that modern democracy has.

I have always been of the opinion that consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative …

… the British cook is a foolish woman, who should be turned, for her iniquities, into a pillar of that salt which she never knows how to use.

Of Shakespeare it may be said he was the first to see the dramatic value of doublets, and that a climax may depend on a crinoline.

… the stage is not merely the meeting-place of all the arts, but is also the return of art to life.

The true dramatist … shows us life under the conditions of art, not art in the form of life.

… our ordinary English novelists … fail … in concentration of style. Their characters are far too eloquent and talk themselves to tatters. What we want is a little more reality and a little less rhetoric … we wish that they would talk less and think more.

They lead us through a barren desert of verbiage to a mirage that they call life: we wander aimlessly through a very wilderness of words in search of one touch of nature. However, one should not be too severe on English novels; they are the only relaxation of the intellectually unemployed.

A poet can survive everything but a misprint.

… a poet without hysterics is rare.

There is no such thing as a stupid American. Many Americans are horrid, vulgar, intrusive and impertinent, just as many English people are also; but stupidity is not one of the national vices. Indeed, in America there is no opening for a fool. They expect brains even from a boot-black, and get them.

As for marriage, it is one of their most popular institutions. The American man marries early, and the American woman marries often; and they get on extremely well together.

America has never quite forgiven Europe for having been

discovered somewhat earlier in history than itself.

… it would be a very good thing if people were taught how to speak. Language is the noblest instrument we have, either for the revealing or the concealing of thought; talk itself is a sort of spiritualized action; and conversation is one of the loveliest of the arts.

The only form of fiction in which real characters do not seem out of place is history.

Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion; and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She had more than once changed her husband; indeed, Debrett credits her with three marriages; but as she had never changed her lover, the world had long ago ceased to talk scandal about her.

Unless one is wealthy there is no use in being a charming fellow. Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed. The poor should be practical and prosaic. It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating.

Nobody, even in the provinces, should ever be allowed to ask an intelligent question about pure mathematics across a dinner table. A question of this kind is quite as bad as inquiring suddenly about the state of a man's soul …

But what is the good of friendship if one cannot say exactly what one means? Anybody can say charming things and try to please and to flatter, but a true friend always says unpleasant things, and does not mind giving pain. Indeed, if he is a really true friend he prefers it, for he knows that then he is doing good.

The only thing that sustains one through life is the consciousness of the immense inferiority of everybody else, and this is a feeling that I have always cultivated.

I am so clever that sometimes I don't understand a single word of what I am saying.

I have always been of opinion that hard work is simply the refuge of people who have nothing whatever to do.

All that is known by that term [*fin de siècle*] I particularly admire and love. It is the fine flower of our civilization: the only thing that keeps the world from the commonplace, the coarse, the barbarous.

Flaubert did not write French prose, but the prose of a great artist who happened to be French.

I was thinking in bed this morning that the great superiority of France over England is that in France every bourgeois wants to be an artist, whereas in England every artist wants to be a bourgeois.

Prayer must never be answered: if it is, it ceases to be prayer and becomes correspondence.

I have made an important discovery … that alcohol, taken in sufficient quantities, produces all the effects of intoxication.

Missionaries, my dear! Don't you realize that missionaries are the divinely provided food for destitute and underfed cannibals? Whenever they are on the brink of starvation, Heaven in its infinite mercy sends them a nice plump missionary.

Philosophy teaches us to bear with equanimity the misfortunes of others.

My own experience is that the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature … Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place.

Thinking is the most unhealthy thing in the world, and people die of it just as they die of any other disease. Fortunately, in England at any rate, thought is not catching.

In literature we require distinction, charm, beauty and imaginative power. We don't want to be harrowed and disgusted with an account of the doings of the lower orders.

I quite admit that modern novels have many good points. All I insist on is that, as a class, they are quite unreadable.

Art itself is really a form of exaggeration; and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis.

Facts are not merely finding a footing-place in history, but they are usurping the domain of Fancy, and have invaded the kingdom of Romance. Their chilling touch is over everything. They are vulgarizing mankind.

Society sooner or later must return to its lost leader, the cultured and fascinating liar.

Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life … Life holds the mirror up to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realizes in fact what has been dreamed in fiction.

… imitation can be made the sincerest form of insult.

Yesterday evening Mrs Arundel insisted on my going to the window, and looking at the glorious sky, as she called it. Of course I had to look at it. She is one of those absurdly pretty Philistines to whom one can deny nothing. And what was it? It was simply a very second-rate Turner, a Turner of a bad period, with all the painter's worst faults exaggerated and over-emphasized.

The more abstract, the more ideal an art is, the more it reveals to us the temper of its age. If we wish to understand a nation by means of its art, let us look at its architecture or its music.

The fact is that we look back on the ages entirely through the medium of art, and art, very fortunately, has never once told us the

truth.

To become a work of art is the object of living.

The English are always degrading truths into facts. When a truth becomes a fact it loses all its intellectual value.

There is a great deal to be said in favour of reading a novel backwards. The last page is as a rule the most interesting, and when one begins with the catastrophe or the *dénouement* one feels on pleasant terms of equality with the author. It is like going behind the scenes of a theatre. One is no longer taken in, and the hair-breadth escapes of the hero and the wild agonies of the heroine leave one absolutely unmoved. One knows the jealously guarded secret, and one can afford to smile at the quite unnecessary anxiety that the puppets of fiction always consider it their duty to display.

All charming people, I fancy, are spoiled. It is the secret of their attraction.

It is always a silly thing to give advice, but to give good advice is absolutely fatal. I hope you will never fall into that error. If you do, you will be sorry for it.

You forget that a thing is not necessarily true because a man dies for it.

Art, even the art of fullest scope and widest vision, can never really show us the external world. All that it shows us is our own soul, the one world of which we have any real cognizance … It is Art, and Art only, that reveals us to ourselves.

A critic should be taught to criticize a work of art without making any reference to the personality of the author. This, in fact, is the beginning of criticism.

Every great man nowadays has his disciples, and it is always Judas who writes the biography.

Learned conversation is either the affectation of the ignorant or the profession of the mentally unemployed.

Education is an admirable thing. But it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.

Anybody can write a three-volume novel. It merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature.

Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write it.

It is sometimes said that the tragedy of an artist's life is that he cannot realize his ideal. But the true tragedy that dogs the steps of most artists is that they realize their ideal too absolutely. For, when the ideal is realized, it is robbed of its wonder and its mystery, and becomes simply a new starting-point for an ideal that is other than itself. This is the reason why music is the perfect type of art.

Conversation should touch everything, but should concentrate itself on nothing.

… life is terribly deficient in form. Its catastrophes happen in the wrong way and to the wrong people. There is a grotesque horror about its comedies, and its tragedies seem to culminate in farce. One is always wounded when one approaches it. Things last either too long or not long enough.

… all the arts are immoral, except those baser forms of sensual or didactic art that seek to excite to action of evil or of good. For action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics. The aim of art is simply to create a mood.

There is no country in the world so much in need of unpractical people as this country of ours. With us, Thought is degraded by its constant association with practice … We live in the age of the overworked, and the under-educated; the age in which people are so industrious that they become absolutely stupid.

The sure way of knowing nothing about life is to try to make

oneself useful.

It is so easy for people to have sympathy with suffering. It is so difficult for them to have sympathy with thought.

An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all.

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.

For what is Truth? In matters of religion, it is simply the opinion that has survived. In matters of science, it is the ultimate sensation. In matters of art, it is one's last mood.

There are two ways of disliking art … One is to dislike it. The other, to like it rationally.

A little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is absolutely fatal.

Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.

Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope.

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.

Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.

All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself.

We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely.

Experience was of no ethical value. It was merely the name men gave to their mistakes.

There is always something ridiculous about the emotions of people whom one has ceased to love.

There is a luxury in self-reproach. When we blame ourselves we feel that no one else has a right to blame us. It is the confession, not the priest, that gives us absolution.

Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities.

With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.

There is only one class in the community that thinks more about money than the rich, and that is the poor. The poor can think of nothing else. That is the misery of being poor.

High hopes were once formed of democracy; but democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people.

The fact is, that civilization requires slaves. The Greeks were quite right there. Unless there are slaves to do the ugly, horrible, uninteresting work, culture and contemplation become almost impossible. Human slavery is wrong, insecure and demoralizing. On mechanical slavery, on the slavery of the machine, the future of the world depends.

A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament … the

moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or a dishonest tradesman.

Now Art should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself artistic.

In England, the arts that have escaped best are the arts in which the public take no interest. Poetry is an instance of what I mean. We have been able to have fine poetry in England because the public do not read it, and consequently do not influence it.

In the old days men had the rack. Now they have the Press.

In England, Journalism, except in a few well-known instances, not having been carried to such excesses of brutality, is still a great factor, a really remarkable power. The tyranny that it proposes to exercise over people's private lives seems to me to be quite extraordinary. The fact is that the public have an insatiable curiosity to know everything, except what is worth knowing. Journalism, conscious of this, and having tradesman-like habits, supplies their demands. In centuries before ours the public nailed the ears of journalists to the pump. That was quite hideous. In this century journalists have nailed their own ears to the keyhole. That is much worse.

Anybody can sympathize with the sufferings of a friend, but it requires a very fine nature – it requires, in fact, that nature of a true Individualist – to sympathize with a friend's success.

Work is the curse of the drinking classes of this country.

Public opinion exists only where there are no ideas.

A subject that is beautiful in itself gives no suggestion to the artist. It lacks imperfection.

Art is the only serious thing in the world. And the artist is the only person who is never serious.

The only thing that can console one for being poor is extravagance. The only thing that can console one for being rich is economy.

One should never listen. To listen is a sign of indifference to one's hearers.

The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible. What the second duty is no one has as yet discovered.

Wickedness is a myth invented by good people to account for the curious attractiveness of others.

Those who see any difference between soul and body have neither.

A really well-made buttonhole is the only link between Art and Nature.

Religions die when they are proved to be true. Science is the record of dead religions.

The well-bred contradict other people. The wise contradict themselves.

Nothing that actually occurs is of the smallest importance.

Dullness is the coming of age of seriousness.

In all unimportant matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential. In all important matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential.

If one tells the truth, one is sure, sooner or later, to be found out.

Pleasure is the only thing one should live for. Nothing ages like happiness.

No crime is vulgar, but all vulgarity is crime. Vulgarity is the conduct of others.

Only the shallow know themselves.

Time is waste of money.

One should always be a little improbable.

There is a fatality about all good resolutions. They are invariably made too soon.

The only way to atone for being occasionally a little over-dressed is by being always absolutely over-educated.

Any preoccupation with ideas of what is right or wrong in conduct shows an arrested intellectual development.

Ambition is the last refuge of the failure.

One should either be a work of art, or wear a work of art.

It is only the superficial qualities that last. Man's deeper nature is soon found out.

Industry is the root of all ugliness.

The ages live in history through their anachronisms.

The old believe everything: the middle-aged suspect everything: the young know everything.

The condition of perfection is idleness: the aim of perfection is youth.

Only the great masters of style ever succeed in being obscure.

To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance.

Oh, it is indeed a burning shame that there would be one law for men and another law for women. I think that there should be no law for anybody.

After the first glass, you see things as you wish they were. After the second, you see things as they are not. Finally you see things as

they really are, and that is the most horrible thing in the world. (On absinthe)

My existence is a scandal.

It often happens that the real tragedies of life occur in such an inarticulate manner that they hurt one by their crude violence, their absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of style.

Ultimately the bond of all companionship, whether in marriage or in friendship, is conversation …

Sins of the flesh are nothing. They are maladies for physicians to cure, if they should be cured. Sins of the soul alone are shameful.

The aim of love is to love: no more, and no less.

To regret one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development. To deny one's own experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life. It is no less than a denial of the soul.

What the artist is always looking for is the mode of existence in which soul and body are one and indivisible: in which the outward is expressive of the inward: in which form reveals.

Now it seems to me that love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering that there is in the world.

Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

Every single work of art is the fulfilment of a prophecy: for every work of art is the conversion of an idea into an image.

… all great ideas are dangerous.

Art only begins where Imitation ends …

All bad art is the result of good intentions.

By nature and by choice, I am extremely indolent.

I never put off till tomorrow what I can possibly do – the day after.

I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws.

Praise makes me humble, but when I am abused I know I have touched the stars.

Where will it all end? Half the world does not believe in God, and the other half does not believe in me.

If I were all alone, marooned on some desert island and had my things with me, I should dress for dinner every evening.

I have the simplest tastes. I am always satisfied with the best.

A patriot put in prison for loving his country loves his country, and a poet in prison for loving boys loves boys. To have altered my life would have been to have admitted that Uranian love is ignoble. I hold it to be noble, more noble than other forms.

I entered prison with a heart of stone, thinking only of my pleasure, but now my heart has been broken; pity has entered my heart; I now understand that pity is the greatest and the most beautiful thing that there is in the world. And that's why I can't be angry with those who condemned me, nor with anyone, because then I would not have known all that.

I am not a scrap ashamed of having been in prison. I am horribly ashamed of the materialism of the life that brought me there. It was quite unworthy of an artist.

I love acting. It is so much more real than life.

As soon as people are old enough to know better, they don't know anything at all.

The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young.

To get back my youth I would do anything in the world, except take exercise, get up early, or be respectable.

One can always be kind to people about whom one cares nothing.

Self-sacrifice is a thing that should be put down by law. It is so demoralizing to the people for whom one sacrifices oneself.

English people are far more interested in American barbarism than they are in American civilization.

Every right article of apparel belongs equally to both sexes, and there is absolutely no such thing as a definitely feminine garment.

It is really only the idle classes who dress badly. Wherever physical labour of any kind is required, the costume used is, as a rule, absolutely right, for labour necessitates freedom, and without freedom there is no such thing as beauty in dress at all.

With an evening coat and a white tie, anybody, even a stock-broker, can gain a reputation for being civilized.

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances.

Being natural is simply a pose, and the most irritating pose I know.

Perhaps one never seems so much at one's ease as when one has to play a part.

I think a man should invent his own myth.

All art is quite useless.

No great artist ever sees things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to be an artist.

The desire for beauty is merely a heightened form of the desire for life.

Extravagance is the luxury of the poor, penury the luxury of the rich.

We are often told that the poor are grateful for charity. Some of them are, no doubt, but the best amongst the poor are never grateful. They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so.

To recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less.

Why should they [the poor] be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to know it.

The real tragedy of the poor is that they can afford nothing but self-denial. Beautiful sins, like beautiful things, are the privilege of the rich.

A *grande passion* is the privilege of people who have nothing to do. That is the one use of the idle classes of a country.

The inherited stupidity of the race – sound English common sense.

Anybody can have common sense, provided that they have no imagination.

I love superstitions. They are the colour element of thought and imagination. They are the opponents of common sense.

Nowadays most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover, when it is too late, that the only thing one never regrets are one's mistakes.

Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live.

Conversation is one of the loveliest of the arts.

Recreation, not instruction, is the aim of conversation.

The maxim ‘If you find the company dull, blame yourself’ seems to us somewhat optimistic.

In the case of meeting a genius and a duke at dinner, the good talker will try to raise himself to the level of the former and to bring the latter down to his own level. To succeed among one’s social superiors one must have no hesitation in contradicting them.

A man who can dominate a London dinner table can dominate the world.

I adore them [London dinner parties]. The clever people never listen, and the stupid people never talk.

It is only the intellectually lost who ever argue.

To believe is very dull. To doubt is intensely engrossing. To be on the alert is to live, to be lulled into security is to die.

I never approve, or disapprove, of anything now. It is an absurd attitude to take towards life. We are not sent into the world to air our moral prejudices.

The things one feels absolutely certain about are never true. That is the fatality of Faith, and the lesson of Romance.

No man dies for what he knows to be true. Men die for what they want to be true, for what some terror in their hearts tells them is not true.

Murder is always a mistake. One should never do anything that one cannot talk about after dinner.

Starvation, and not sin, is the parent of modern crime.

A community is infinitely more brutalized by the habitual employment of punishment, than it is by the occasional occurrence of crime.

Prison life makes one see people and things as they really are. That

is why it turns one to stone. It is the people outside who are deceived by the illusion of a life in constant motion.

To those who are in prison, tears are a part of every day's experience. A day in prison on which one does not weep is a day on which one's heart is hard, not a day on which one's heart is happy.

The most terrible thing about it [imprisonment] is not that it breaks one's heart – hearts are made to be broken – but that it turns one's heart to stone.

It is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it.

The one advantage of playing with fire … is that one never even gets singed. It is the people who don't know how to play with it who get burned up.

What is a cynic? A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

The sentimentalist is always a cynic at heart. Indeed sentimentality is merely the bank holiday of cynicism.

A sentimentalist is simply a man who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it.

He is a typical Englishman, always dull and usually violent.

Like all people who try to exhaust a subject, he exhausted his listeners.

She behaves as if she was beautiful. Most American women do. It is the secret of their charm.

She tried to look picturesque, but only succeeded in being untidy.

[She] talks more and says less than anybody I ever met. She is made to be a public speaker.

A dowdy dull girl, with one of those characteristic British faces, that, once seen, are never remembered.

Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation.

Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion.

In art, as in politics, there is but one origin for all revolutions, a desire on the part of man for a nobler form of life, for a freer method and opportunity of expression.

It is the first duty of a gentleman to dream.

A dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.

Society often forgives the criminal; it never forgives the dreamer.

The one person who has more illusions than the dreamer is the man of action.

My duty to myself is to amuse myself terrifically.

People never think of cultivating a young girl's imagination. It is the great defect of modern education.

We teach people how to remember, we never teach them how to grow.

In the summer term Oxford teaches the exquisite art of idleness, one of the most important things that any University can teach.

The secret of life is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming.

It is only shallow people who require years to get rid of an emotion. A man who is master of himself can end a sorrow as easily as he can invent a pleasure.

Beer, the Bible, and the seven deadly virtues have made our England what she is.

The English public always feels perfectly at its ease when a mediocrity is talking to it.

A family is a terrible encumbrance, especially when one is not married.

Fashion is merely a form of ugliness so unbearable that we are compelled to alter it every six months.

An acquaintance that begins with a compliment is sure to develop into a real friendship. It starts in the right manner.

Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one.

I always like to know everything about my new friends, and nothing about my old ones.

Formal courtesies will strain a close friendship.

Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.

This grey, monstrous London of ours, with its myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins.

I don't like Switzerland: it has produced nothing but theologians and waiters.

There is this to be said in favour of the despot, that he, being an individual, may have culture, while the mob, being a monster, has none.

History never repeats itself. The historians repeat each other.

The one duty we owe to history is to re-write it.

The reason we all like to think so well of others is that we are all afraid for ourselves. The basis of optimism is sheer terror.

Laughter is the primeval attitude towards life – a mode of approach that survives only in artists and criminals.

To do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world, the most difficult and the most intellectual.

The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for.

One can live for years sometimes without living at all, and then all life comes crowding into one single hour.

We can have in life but one great experience at best, and the secret of life is to reproduce that experience as often as possible.

Don't tell me that you have exhausted life. When a man says that one knows that life has exhausted him.

To become the spectator of one's own life is to escape the suffering of life.

Life cheats us with shadows. We ask it for pleasure. It gives it to us, with bitterness and disappointment in its train.

Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose. The nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac.

I hate vulgar realism in literature. The man who could call a spade a spade should be compelled to use one.

Are there not books that can make us live more in one single hour than life can make us live in a score of shameful years?

To introduce real people into a novel or a play is a sign of an unimaginative mind, a coarse, untutored observation, and an entire absence of style.

The books that the world calls immoral books are books that show the world its own shame.

No one survives being over-estimated, nor is there any surer way of destroying an author's reputation than to glorify him without judgement and to praise him without tact.

All love is a tragedy.

Misunderstanding … is the basis of love.

Those who are faithful know only the trivial side of love: it is the faithless who know love's tragedies.

Faithfulness is to the emotional life what consistency is to the life of the intellect – simply a confession of failure.

Lust … makes one love all that one loathes.

It is difficult not to be unjust to what one loves.

One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry.

The proper basis for marriage is a mutual misunderstanding.

Married life is merely a habit, a bad habit.

How marriage ruins a man! It's as demoralizing as cigarettes, and far more expensive.

The happiness of a married man … depends on the people he has not married.

The one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties.

The world has grown so suspicious of anything that looks like a happy married life.

It's most dangerous nowadays for a husband to pay attention to his wife in public. It always makes people think he beats her when they are alone.

Nowadays everybody is jealous of everyone else, except, of course, husband and wife.

Twenty years of romance make a woman look like a ruin; but twenty years of marriage make her something like a public building.

Girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

Men marry because they are tired; women because they are curious. Both are disappointed.

Men know life too early … Women know life too late. That is the difference between men and women.

The only way a woman can ever reform a man is by boring him so completely that he loses all possible interest in life.

When a man has once loved a woman, he will do anything for her, except continue to love her.

A man can be happy with any woman, as long as he does not love her.

Men always want to be a woman's first love. That is their clumsy vanity … Women have a more subtle instinct about things. What [they] like is to be a man's last romance.

There is only one real tragedy in a woman's life. The fact that the past is always her lover, and her future invariably her husband.

Between men and women there is no friendship possible. There is passion, enmity, worship, love, but no friendship.

Women have a wonderful instinct about things. They can discover everything except the obvious.

One should never trust a woman who tells one her real age. A woman who would tell one that, would tell one anything.

It is only very ugly or very beautiful women who ever hide their faces.

If a woman wants to hold a man she has merely to appeal to what is worst in him.

I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train.

There are many things that we would throw away if we were not afraid that others might pick them up.

Why is it that one runs to one's ruin? Why has destruction such a fascination?

One needs misfortunes to live happily.

To live in happiness, you must know some unhappiness in life.

The happy people of the world have their value, but only the negative value of foils. They throw up and emphasize the beauty and the fascination of the unhappy.

What fire does not destroy, it hardens.

Suffering and the community of suffering makes people kind.

While to propose to be a better man is a piece of unscientific cant, to have become a *deeper* man is the privilege of those who have suffered.

There is no truth comparable to Sorrow. There are times when Sorrow seems to me to be the only truth.

All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment.

Nothing succeeds like excess.

Pure modernity of form is always somewhat vulgarizing.

Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern; one is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly.

The value of the telephone is the value of what two people have to say.

Only one thing remains infinitely fascinating to me, the mystery of moods. To be master of these moods is exquisite, to be mastered by them more exquisite still.

You people who go in for being consistent have just as many moods as others have. The only difference is that your moods are rather meaningless.

There must be no mood with which one cannot sympathize, no dead mode of life that one cannot make alive.

Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike.

There is no such thing as morality, for there is no general rule of spiritual health; it is all personal, individual.

Modern morality consists in accepting the standard of one's age. I consider that for any man of culture to accept the standard of his age is a form of the grossest immorality.

Manners are of more importance than morals.

The moral is too obvious.

I never came across anyone in whom the moral sense was dominant who was not heartless, cruel, vindictive, log-stupid, and entirely lacking in the smallest sense of humanity. Moral people, as they are termed, are simple beasts.

Music is the art … which most completely realizes the artistic idea, and is the condition to which all the other arts are constantly

aspiring.

Music … creates for one a past of which one has been ignorant, and fills one with a sense of sorrows that have been hidden from one's tears.

If one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music, people don't talk.

I like Wagner's music better than anybody's. It is so loud that one can talk the whole time without people hearing what one says.

Musical people are so absurdly unreasonable. They always want one to be perfectly dumb at the very moment when one is longing to be absolutely deaf.

The things of nature do not really belong to us; we should leave them to our children as we have received them.

In nature there is, for me at any rate, healing power.

We all look at Nature too much, and live with her too little.

If Nature had been comfortable, mankind would never have invented architecture.

Nature, which makes nothing durable, always repeats itself so that nothing which it makes may be lost.

Nature is always behind the age.

Whenever we have returned to Life and Nature, our work has always become vulgar, common, and uninteresting.

There are only two kinds of people who are really fascinating – people who know absolutely everything, and people who know absolutely nothing.

Of course I plagiarize. It is the privilege of the appreciative man.

It is only the unimaginative who ever invent. The true artist is known by the use he makes of what he annexes, and he annexes everything.

Every word in a play has a musical as well as an intellectual value, and must be made expressive of a certain emotion.

I never write plays for anyone. I write plays to amuse myself. After, if people want to act in them, I sometimes allow them to do so.

There are two ways of disliking my plays. One is to dislike them, the other is to like *Earnest*.

Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When man is happy he is in harmony with himself and his environment.

No civilized man ever regrets a pleasure, and no uncivilized man ever knows what a pleasure is.

I adore simple pleasures. They are the last refuge of the complex.

A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more can one want?

I don't regret for a single moment having lived for pleasure. I did it to the full, as one should do everything that one does to the full. There was no pleasure I did not experience.

I like persons better than principles, and I like persons with no principles better than anything else in the world.

I don't like principles … I prefer prejudices.

It is personalities, not principles, that move the age.

I wonder who it was defined man as a rational animal. It was the most premature definition ever given. Man is many things, but he is not rational.

One is tempted to define man as a rational animal who always loses

his temper when he is called upon to act in accordance with the dictates of reason.

It would be unfair to expect other people to be as remarkable as oneself.

Only dull people are brilliant at breakfast.

Nº 98

‘But I, being poor, have only my dreams; I have spread my dreams under your feet . . .’

PENGUIN
LITTLE BLACK
CLASSICS

1. BOCCACCIO · *Mrs Rosie and the Priest*
2. GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS · *As kingfishers catch fire*
3. *The Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-tongue*
4. THOMAS DE QUINCEY · *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*
5. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE · *Aphorisms on Love and Hate*
6. JOHN RUSKIN · *Traffic*
7. PU SONGLING · *Wailing Ghosts*
8. JONATHAN SWIFT · *A Modest Proposal*
9. *Three Tang Dynasty Poets*
10. WALT WHITMAN · *On the Beach at Night Alone*
11. KENKŌ · *A Cup of Sake Beneath the Cherry Trees*
12. BALTASAR GRACIÁN · *How to Use Your Enemies*
13. JOHN KEATS · *The Eve of St Agnes*
14. THOMAS HARDY · *Woman much missed*
15. GUY DE MAUPASSANT · *Femme Fatale*
16. MARCO POLO · *Travels in the Land of Serpents and Pearls*
17. SUETONIUS · *Caligula*
18. APOLLONIUS OF RHODES · *Jason and Medea*
19. ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON · *Olalla*
20. KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS · *The Communist Manifesto*
21. PETRONIUS · *Trimalchio's Feast*
22. JOHANN PETER HEBEL · *How a Ghastly Story Was Brought to Light by a Common or Garden Butcher's Dog*
23. HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN · *The Tinder Box*
24. RUDYARD KIPLING · *The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows*
25. DANTE · *Circles of Hell*
26. HENRY MAYHEW · *Of Street Piemen*
27. HAFEZ · *The nightingales are drunk*
28. GEOFFREY CHAUCER · *The Wife of Bath*
29. MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE · *How We Weep and Laugh at the Same Thing*
30. THOMAS NASHE · *The Terrors of the Night*

31. EDGAR ALLAN POE · *The Tell-Tale Heart*
32. MARY KINGSLEY · *A Hippo Banquet*
33. JANE AUSTEN · *The Beautifull Cassandra*
34. ANTON CHEKHOV · *Gooseberries*
35. SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE · *Well, they are gone, and here must I remain*
36. JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE · *Sketchy, Doubtful, Incomplete Jottings*
37. CHARLES DICKENS · *The Great Winglebury Duel*
38. HERMAN MELVILLE · *The Maldive Shark*
39. ELIZABETH GASKELL · *The Old Nurse's Story*
40. NIKOLAY LESKOV · *The Steel Flea*
41. HONORÉ DE BALZAC · *The Atheist's Mass*
42. CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN · *The Yellow Wall-Paper*
43. C. P. CAVAFY · *Remember, Body …*
44. FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY · *The Meek One*
45. GUSTAVE FLAUBERT · *A Simple Heart*
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63. EMILY BRONTË · *The Night is Darkening Round Me*
64. JOSEPH CONRAD · *To-morrow*
65. RICHARD HAKLUYT · *The Voyage of Sir Francis Drake Around*

the Whole Globe

66. KATE CHOPIN · *A Pair of Silk Stockings*
67. CHARLES DARWIN · *It was snowing butterflies*
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89. WILLIAM BLAKE · *Tyger, Tyger*
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